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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 11th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 26 March 2001, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mr. DESPOUY (Argentina)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

SPECIAL DEBATE ON TOLERANCE AND RESPECT

1. The CHAIRPERSON said that each year for the past three years the Commission had devoted one day to a Special Debate on a specific topic. The topic chosen for the current session was tolerance and respect, a particularly appropriate subject given that 2001 was United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations and the year of the World Conference against Racism. Lessons must be learned from the past, and particularly from such twentieth-century phenomena and scourges as Nazism and apartheid, which had been based on intolerance and non-respect for the principle of equality, opening the way to many other violations of individuals' rights, including the right to life. The principle of equality was one of the foundations of the protection of human rights; that explained the importance of non-discrimination, but equality did not imply identity. Equality must prevail within the framework of diversity that characterized the world. That was an essential element of the Debate on tolerance and respect.

2. The issue would first be considered from the perspective of reconciliation, by the Most Reverend Desmond Tutu, the 1984 Nobel Peace Prize laureate and Chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa in 1995. It would then be considered from the standpoint of social exclusion by Senator Aden Ridgeway, the only indigenous member of the Australian Federal Parliament, and from the standpoint of religion by Mr. Soheib Bencheikh, Mufti of Marseille (France), who in 1998 had participated in the seminar on Islamic perspectives on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The debate was intended to provide guidelines on specific proposals to be formulated at the World Conference against Racism.

3. Ms. ROBINSON (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) said it was necessary not only to combat the four negative forces of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, but also to have a clear vision of what positive values should be promoted. That was the purpose of the Commission's Special Debate on tolerance and respect. Tolerance was a minimum; it was the opposite of the intolerance represented by the four negative forces she had referred to. Respect went much further. It required a positive response based on the dignity and worth of each individual recognized in the preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It involved listening, valuing what had been heard, and embracing difference. Victims of intolerance throughout the world, particularly migrants, indigenous peoples, minorities of African descent, Roma and Travellers, women and children victims of trafficking, refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons looked to the Durban Conference to change the climate of prejudice and marginalization to one of respect for and appreciation of their difference. Action-oriented means must be found of promoting the principles of tolerance and respect. That was a key element in the strategy for prevention of human rights violations.

4. The first step was to develop a better understanding of why human differences were sometimes perceived as a threat. Intolerance tended to be rooted in fear: fear of what was unfamiliar or different, fear of the other, fear of the loss of personal security, fear of economic competition. The task was to try to minimize the consequences of fear by seeking innovative ways of preventing past errors from recurring. That was a central message of the Declaration on Tolerance and Diversity: a Vision for the 21st Century, signed by 77 Heads of State and

Government, and it was also the message transmitted by young people participating at the round table discussions held on International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

5. During the current session the Commission must identify concrete measures that States could take in the immediate term to prepare for their participation in the World Conference against Racism. The Special Debate on tolerance and respect provided the Commission with an opportunity to reflect on issues such as religious intolerance, economic, political and social exclusion and discrimination against migrants, and to examine the role that education and the media could play in promoting a better understanding of cultural, religious, racial and ethnic diversity. Some background information on the question was provided in document E/CN.4/2000/CRP.4.

6. In conclusion, she thanked the six eminent persons who had agreed to participate in the debate, and all the other participants, who would explain what lessons could be learned from the past and outline constructive ways of promoting tolerance and respect.

7. The CHAIRPERSON thanked the members of the outgoing bureau, members of the bureau of the fifty-seventh session of the Commission and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for their contributions to the organization of the Special Debate.

8. The Most Reverend Desmond TUTU said that the beautiful story of Adam and Eve, and especially the part telling of the creation of Eve so that Adam would not be alone, was a charming illustration of the nature of human beings, who had been created to be together, to form one family and to complement one another. To talk of a solitary human being was a contradiction in terms, for every human being needed other human beings in order to learn how to be human. No one would be able to talk, walk, think, or eat like a human being without first learning to do those things from other human beings. No human being could be totally self-sufficient. Human beings needed other human beings in order to fulfil their potential. And God had not made a mistake in creating human beings to be different, but had done so to enable them to be complementary and interdependent. In South Africa the word ubuntu was used to describe the essence of being human. Ubuntu was generosity, compassion, gentleness, magnanimity, forgiveness and reconciliation, and it was ubuntu that had enabled Nelson Mandela and the many victims of apartheid to forgive their tormentors; for resentment, hatred and retribution corroded the harmony between the communities in African society. To do evil harmed not just the victim, but also the perpetrator, by dehumanizing him or her as much as, if not more than, the victim.

9. The entire universe was characterized by diversity. There were different sorts of planets, galaxies, animals, plants, races and ethnic groups. The human body was itself made up of different organs performing different functions. That glorious diversity was written into all aspects of life. For Christians, it was to be found in the image of one God in three persons, and it was that imago dei that invested every individual, regardless of race, gender, economic or social status or level of education, with an intrinsic worth not dependent on any external factor. Thus, there could be no superior or inferior race. All human beings were born free and equal in dignity and in rights, and were deserving of respect whatever the circumstances. The very essence of the world was diversity, and to ignore that basic fact was to live in a fool's paradise. All human beings should thus celebrate their diversity and exult in their differences - differences that made

not for separation, alienation and hostility, but for solidarity, friendship, interdependence and complementarity of all as members of one family, the human family, God's family. It was the refusal to acknowledge that obvious fact that had spawned the racially discriminatory selling of human beings into slavery in the United States of America, the Holocaust in Germany, genocidal massacres in Armenia and Rwanda, ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, apartheid and conflicts in Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, the Middle East and the Sudan. Religion, too, which should encourage tolerance, respect, compassion, peace, reconciliation and sharing, had all too frequently fuelled intolerance, injustice and oppression. The ghastliest atrocities had been committed in the name of religion, whereas no religion could hope to have a monopoly on virtue and truth.

10. The survival of human beings as a species would depend not on eliminating those who were different, for that could lead only to stagnation, and ultimately to death and disintegration. People living in times of insecurity, poverty and unemployment often tended to take refuge in fundamentalist movements of various kinds and to seek scapegoats among those who were different in appearance, behaviour and thought; whereas the reality was that the issues were much more complex. Everyone must work for coexistence and tolerance. Only when people respected their adversaries and saw them not as ogres but as fellow human beings deserving respect for their personhood and dignity, would it be possible to conduct a discourse that might avoid conflict. And when conflict occurred, it could be resolved in ways other than through revenge and retribution. That was what the South African people had tried to do, and perhaps others too would discover that there was no future without forgiveness and that, whether they liked it or not, all human beings were members of one family. It was not good for a human being to be alone, there was room on Earth for everyone - for every culture, race, language and point of view.

11. Mr. RIDGEWAY began by pointing out that many indigenous leaders, among them Chief Deskaheh in 1926, had tried in vain to persuade the international community, in a spirit of truth and justice, to recognize the rights of indigenous people. In Australia, the majority of the population had declared their willingness to reconsider their relationship with indigenous Australians and the history of the country since its colonization by the British more than two centuries previously. The concept of reconciliation had been well and truly embraced in Australia, after a decade of work by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation established by the national parliament, but only a minority of non-indigenous Australians were truly ready to take effective action to ensure that the fundamental rights of the indigenous population were recognized and protected, and to share political power and the country's abundant resources with indigenous people. That had been clearly apparent in the decision taken by the High Court of Australia in 1992, in the Mabo case, overturning the legal fiction that Australia had been an empty continent when the British arrived, and recognizing that Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders had been the original inhabitants, with their own laws, languages and social constructs, and thus possessing territorial rights. That decision had rocked the foundations of Australian law and had led to a profound re-evaluation of relationships between indigenous and other Australians. The way in which the reconciliation process was unfolding in Australia showed, however, that the country was still a long way from undoing the effects of the terra nullius doctrine, a doctrine that was still alive and well in the Australian mind.

12. While the awareness-raising campaigns conducted by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation were beginning to reap rewards, little progress had been made in eradicating prejudice against indigenous people. Furthermore, various issues had not been resolved, among them the questions of reparations and the need for an apology to the indigenous families and communities that had been separated from their children; the discriminatory laws against young indigenous people; the deaths of indigenous people while in custody; and the fact that indigenous people constituted an unduly high proportion of the prison population. Indigenous peoples had clearly articulated what they considered to be their rights, at international level in the draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and in Australia, through negotiations with the political parties and through their own representative bodies countrywide. Those rights included, but were not limited to, the right to self-determination, and the rights to land, cultural heritage and identity. Those rights were additional to all the other rights - such as the rights to housing, employment, health services and education - which they were entitled to enjoy as citizens; but were intended to secure recognition of the qualities that distinguished them as "indigenous". It was to be noted that it was not until 1967, following a national referendum, that indigenous people had been recognized as full citizens with all the rights that status implied, and that for some considerable time thereafter they had not been considered as equal to other citizens. Australia now had a Racial Discrimination Act and a Human Rights Commission but, as the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination had recently noted, there was no entrenched guarantee against racial discrimination in Australian law, and there was still no explicit reference to indigenous Australians in the Constitution.

13. In many countries, indigenous peoples still did not have access to their rights, and government policies and programmes had not been adapted to take account of their values, beliefs and lifestyles. Governments must facilitate the action taken by indigenous people to exercise their rights and to affirm them in specific everyday situations, by providing them with the necessary financial resources and implementing laws and measures to meet their needs. Representation of indigenous people in political bodies, including parliament; recognition of their rights in the Constitution, enshrining, in particular, the principle of non-discrimination; and the enactment of a bill of rights defining the rights and responsibilities of all citizens and establishing a mechanism for protection against racial discrimination - all those were additional ways of ensuring the participation and empowerment of indigenous people.

14. Other initiatives in favour of indigenous populations taken at international level included the establishment by the Economic and Social Council of a Permanent Forum for Indigenous Peoples and the convening by the United Nations in Sydney, Australia, of a Regional Meeting of Indigenous Peoples on racism, the conclusions and recommendations of which should be incorporated into the provisions relating to indigenous peoples in the draft Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Conference against Racism in Durban (A/CONF.189/WG.1/3). In that regard, he called for paragraph 10 of the draft Declaration to be amended so as to reflect the recognition that indigenous peoples had suffered and continued to suffer grievously from racism and racial discrimination.

15. Racism was perhaps the ugliest phenomenon ever to have afflicted Australian society. The time had come to build relations between the different communities and to reject the idea that a society must be monocultural. The past must be used to shape the future, and the demands for effective participation by indigenous people in decision making must be met, so as to

increase their self-confidence and enable them to show the contribution they could make to the broader community, thereby gaining the respect of other groups in society. Tolerance and social harmony could not exist without mutual respect amongst all the component groups of a country.

16. The process of reconciliation in Australia was very much about dealing with unfinished business, but if reconciliation was to have true meaning, in Australia as in any other country, it must be action-oriented and must become the vehicle for real change in actions and attitudes, so as truly to defeat racism.

17. Mr. BENCHEIKH said it was a great honour to have been invited to address the Commission on the subject of respect and tolerance from the standpoint of religion in general - an invitation that constituted a welcome indication of its members' open-mindedness. Since the origin of humanity, every human group in whatever region had evolved a common ethical system. For a believer, that ethical system could be founded only on faith, but not everyone on Earth was a believer. It was thus necessary to find an ethical system that was neither confessional nor anti-confessional. One could imagine a new ethical system, one that was, as it were, "a-religious" and based on respect for human beings regardless of their ideas and beliefs. Such an ethical system restored religions, including Islam, to their rightful place, in which they addressed a message to humankind without seeking to impose that message. Accordingly, Islam was not the sole preserve of Muslims, who were the instruments, the witnesses, but not the sole possessors, of a truth, which was truth in their eyes alone. Otherwise they would arrogate God's place to themselves, and would set themselves up as judges rather than witnesses. All thinkers and theologians must reflect on the best way of promoting such an ethical system, one that all human being would share in common.

18. That ethical system was not alien to Islam. In that regard a distinction must be drawn between Islam, an extremely liberal religion founded on individual commitment - one that propagated a message of tolerance and had led to the emergence of great philosophers - and movements that had taken root in some trouble-spots of the Islamic world. Muslims were the first victims of the barbaric acts committed in some parts of the world in the name of their religion. The religion of Islam was not a list of obligations and prohibitions, as some would claim. Moreover, the Koran was not a body of law, but a source of inspiration for the legislator. It could be interpreted in different ways in the various parts of the world in which it was read and applied.

19. Ms. AL-HAJJAJI (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) paid tribute to Archbishop Desmond Tutu for the efforts he had made as Chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. She affirmed her country's interest in indigenous questions; the establishment of a Permanent Forum for Indigenous Peoples in the United Nations system was evidence of the universality of the cause championed by Mr. Ridgeway. She also endorsed the view, expressed by Mr. Bencheikh, that Islam was founded on tolerance. Accordingly, a clear distinction must be drawn between the message it transmitted and the abuses committed by some of its adherents.

20. As was proclaimed in the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance, adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1995, tolerance, considered as "harmony in difference", was based on acceptance of diversity, which constituted a source of riches rather than a threat to humanity, and on social harmony. The twentieth century

had witnessed massacres that reflected a diminution of tolerance and an intensification of exclusion. A number of countries, particularly in Africa, had suffered under colonization and slavery, direct consequences of intolerance and racism. In particular, the intellectual and cultural property of the African people had been plundered. The international community was now more sensitive to the effects of racism and discrimination, and she would be pleased to hear the views of speakers in the Special Debate regarding the issue of reparations to victims of slavery and racial discrimination.

21. Mr. SIV (United States of America) said that tolerance and respect were the bases for peace and for the implementation of all human rights throughout the world. In particular, freedom of religion, which was mirrored in article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was firmly established in the Constitution of the United States of America, a country in which virtually every religion was practised.

22. Nations had a duty to nurture respect for individual religious beliefs, by ensuring that closer contacts between cultures were a source of enrichment rather than of conflict. Very often, serious human rights violations were linked to some combination of racial, ethnic and religious intolerance, a clear case in point being the destruction of Buddhist statues by the Taliban in Afghanistan. Members of the United States delegation were adherents of various creeds, but, regardless of their religious affiliations, they had all been offended by that act. His Government once again called upon the Taliban to recognize their responsibilities under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and vigorously condemned their action.

23. The international community must fight stereotypes and embrace a culture of tolerance, so as to enable nations to make the progress that a new millennium would demand of them.

24. Mr. ERMAKOV (Russian Federation) said that the problem of intolerance had taken on global proportions. The melting away of frontiers that had separated national cultures had sparked cultural and ethnic flows. It was necessary to address the challenge posed by the emergence of universal standards, on the one hand, and by the rapid development of national, cultural and religious identities on the other. Society's response to that challenge would have implications for the whole future of civilization.

25. The complex and difficult relations that had been forged between ethnic groups and States had sometimes led to bloody clashes and internal conflicts, particularly where religion was involved. The two World Wars and the cold war had been the price paid for the lack of ideological compromise in the twentieth century. The eradication of hatred and the establishment of peace in the world were no easy task, given the prevailing climate of intolerance, in which certain groups had recourse to force in an attempt to impose their vision of the world on others as a universal standard.

26. The excessive individualism and mistrust of community life that seemed to underlie contemporary human thought gave rise to strong feelings of disillusionment among populations in east and west alike. There was thus an urgent need to elaborate models for civilization that would permit a harmonization of neoliberalism and traditionalism and a balance between respect for individual and minority rights and the maintenance of the cultural, national and religious identity of peoples, while avoiding an intensification of nationalism.

27. The Russian Federation, which was made up of nations and peoples of different cultures and religions, must ensure that those differences were a source of enrichment and that national and religious feelings were not used to justify political radicalism and xenophobia. Russian religious and political leaders had a moral and political obligation to prevent such situations from arising.

28. Ms. ABOULNAGA (Observer for Egypt), speaking on behalf of the League of Arab States, stressed the importance of the Special Debate in the context of preparations for the World Conference against Racism. The Arab States were determined to ensure the success of the Conference. Tolerance and respect for individual opinions and beliefs were the foundations of Arab civilization. In order to promote tolerance, it was necessary to foster a dialogue between civilizations. In its resolution 53/22 on the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, the General Assembly had noted that tolerance and respect for diversity constituted sound foundations for peace. Combating intolerance and racial discrimination was first and foremost a matter of overcoming prejudices. The Arab countries attached particular importance to education as a means of inculcating the values of tolerance and respect for human rights in children's minds. They were intending to prepare programmes for that purpose for implementation in schools.

29. The tragedy that afflicted the occupied territories, including Jerusalem, was an example of failure to respect the principles of tolerance and human rights. Israel, which was waging a campaign of military repression against an occupied people, did not respect its obligations in the field of human rights. The League of Arab States called upon the international community to ensure respect for the fundamental rights of the Palestinians in the occupied territories. The failure to respect their rights posed a threat not only to stability in the Middle East but also to international cooperation.

30. The Arab countries wished to know whether the international community intended simply to debate tolerance, or whether it intended to take effective measures to defend it. Moreover, they asked whether the international community could take action to promote tolerance in one region, while overlooking its total absence in another region.

31. Mr. LUGRIS (Uruguay) singled out four factors he considered essential in the fight against intolerance: legislation, cooperation with local communities, the role of the media, and that of education. On legislation, Uruguay was one of the few countries in Latin America to have put in place a specific criminal regime punishing incitement to hatred and any other form of moral or physical violence inflicted on persons on grounds of colour, race, religion or national or ethnic origin. Public incitement to hatred by any means, including the Internet, was severely punished. Uruguay called upon countries that had not yet done so to develop their criminal regime in the field of discrimination with a view to establishing new international cooperation mechanisms to combat intolerance more effectively.

32. With regard to cooperation with local communities, Uruguay was convinced that the State and civil society must forge closer links in order to prepare new strategies to combat intolerance. As for the media and the Internet, a distinction must be drawn between the freedom of speech and incitement to hatred. It was important to continue to study means of improving mechanisms for prevention and early warning in the case of dissemination of inflammatory

material. Nevertheless, the media and the Internet were useful tools for the establishment of tolerant societies based on respect for diversity. With regard to education, Uruguay had established education programmes aimed at providing a complete picture of Afro-American history, including the trafficking in slaves to the Southern Cone Countries, and at acknowledging the role played by the descendants of slaves in the independence movement and the creation of the Uruguayan State. In that regard, Uruguay hoped that Latin American history would be reassessed so as to take fuller account of the contribution of indigenous and black populations, thereby transmitting a message of peace that would enable new generations to continue to live in a climate of tolerance and respect for diversity. Throughout the twentieth century, Uruguay had welcomed immigrants from every corner of the world, who had brought with them their culture, traditions and religious beliefs. It would continue to make every effort, at national and international levels, to promote acceptance of foreigners and their integration in society.

33. In conclusion, he stressed the importance of the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education and of the forthcoming International Conference on Education (ICE), and called upon the international community, through, inter alia, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and UNESCO, to increase regional and world cooperation in that field.

34. Ms. MARTENSSON (Observer for Sweden), speaking on behalf of the member States of the European Union, expressed the hope that the Special Debate would make a valuable contribution to the preparations for the World Conference against Racism. The concepts of tolerance and respect were closely linked, and it was not possible to defend the one without promoting the other. Unfortunately, those concepts sometimes served as an excuse for preventing individuals from exercising their rights and fundamental freedoms. The European Union strove to ensure that all countries treated their citizens with respect, regardless of their origin or social status. Concrete measures must be taken at all levels to promote tolerance and respect for diversity, which constituted the foundations of the European Union.

35. As an input to the Debate, the European Union asked the invited speakers how, in their view, religious communities and leaders could contribute to promoting tolerance and respect for diversity.

36. Mr. AZIZ (Observer for Bahrain) said that his country was reaping the first benefits of the wide-ranging programme that had enabled all Bahrainis to work together to develop the country's social, political and economic fabric. In a referendum held on 14 and 15 February 2001, 98.4 per cent of Bahrainis had voted in favour of adoption of the Charter for National Action. A symbol of national unity, the Charter laid the foundations for a new society based on respect for human rights, democracy, the rule of law and transparency. It guaranteed each individual's constitutional rights and freedoms, the independence of the judiciary, the participation of women in society, the creation of a bicameral parliament, the re-establishment of the National Assembly and the holding of general elections in 2004. Bahrain had also repealed the State Security Act and abolished the Court of National Security, decided to free all detainees unconditionally and declared a general amnesty for all its citizens living abroad who wished to return to Bahrain. A Supreme Court had been established to strengthen the independence of the judiciary, and an independent non-governmental organization, the Bahraini

Human Rights Association, had been set up to work in cooperation with the National Human Rights Commission, which was already fully operational. There were currently more than 200 NGOs in Bahrain.

37. Eager to contribute to the promotion of human rights and to foster international cooperation, Bahrain was seeking to become a member of the Commission on Human Rights and had accordingly submitted its candidature for the elections to be held in May 2000. While many tasks still lay ahead of it, Bahrain had made enormous progress in a short period of time, and hoped to collaborate closely with the Commission, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and the various rapporteurs so as to ensure respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

38. Mr. LURIA (Observer for Israel) said that despite all the efforts undertaken at international and national levels, intolerance and prejudice continued to fuel hatred and discrimination. Israeli society was made up of many different cultures and was very proud of that diversity, which derived in part from its absorption of immigrants from all over the world. That diversity could not but enrich the social and cultural fabric of a democratic society. The challenge was to encourage each cultural group in Israel to make its own unique contribution to the development of Israeli society as a whole. Israel was committed to developing constructive dialogue and understanding among the various groups, especially during the current period of tension and violence.

39. In the past decade the principle of equality had been strengthened in Israel. New statutes had been adopted prohibiting discrimination in the workplace and in the educational and health systems. Equality between the sexes had been enshrined in law, as had the rights of the disabled. The Supreme Court had prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex, age, nationality, religion, sexual orientation or disabilities.

40. Civil society and NGOs had a crucial role to play in putting human rights and tolerance at the centre of the political agenda. They had contributed to instilling the essential democratic values of justice and equality in the Israeli population.

41. Education was a key factor in promoting tolerance, democracy and dialogue, and several projects had been implemented in that area. The Ministry of Education had established a department for democracy and coexistence, which operated through NGOs and organized meetings between students from different sectors of society - for instance, between Arabs and Jews, and between secular and religious groups. With support from the Ministry of Education and NGOs, and under the guidance of the Institute for Democratic Education, special schools had been established to provide a non-traditional education that attempted to bridge the gap between the different groups and cultures. Lastly, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel ran a programme in some 60 schools enabling students to track down Internet sites that promoted racist ideas or sought to foment racial hatred, so as to help them learn to distinguish between dissemination of such information and freedom of expression.

42. Relations between religious and secular groups were a major problem in Israel, partly because each felt threatened by the other. A network of colleges, some religious and others

secular, had been established to study and promote Jewish values. Other organizations worked to introduce religious pluralism into Israeli legislation, particularly with regard to marriage.

43. Tel Aviv University had recently published a study unique in its field, devoted to international anti-discriminatory legislation dealing with anti-Semitism, Holocaust denial, racism, xenophobia, religious intolerance and persecution of minorities. Israel was planning to present that survey at the World Conference against Racism, as a contribution to the fight against discrimination and intolerance worldwide.

44. Ms. ANDERSON (Observer for Ireland) said that if religious intolerance and tensions between religious communities were to be alleviated, those problems must first be seen in their economic and political context; for religious intolerance was seldom an isolated phenomenon.

45. In the Good Friday Agreement which they had concluded with a view to easing tensions between the Catholic and Protestant communities in Northern Ireland, the Irish and United Kingdom Governments had taken account of factors such as discrimination in employment and housing and the teaching of certain values in the educational system. The Agreement also provided for the setting up of institutions to monitor respect for human rights.

46. While politicians had a very important role to play, religious leaders, too, must exhort the faithful to follow the paths of tolerance and reconciliation, denounce injustice, and not take refuge in their ivory tower. Those religious leaders who preached intolerance were to be roundly condemned.

47. In conclusion, she expressed the hope that Archbishop Tutu, who had said that there could be no future without forgiveness, would say more about the circumstances in which a pardon could be granted, given that peace and justice were incompatible with impunity.

48. Mr. LEWALTER (Germany) thanked the Chairperson for emphasizing the fact that denial of equality between human beings lay at the root of all violations of human rights. He also thanked Archbishop Tutu for the message of hope he had conveyed, and the Mufti of Marseille, Mr. Bencheikh, who had reminded the Commission that all religions, including Islam, preached love for one's fellow human beings.

49. It was the experience of Nazism and the Holocaust that had led Germany, in 1948, to place the inviolability of human dignity and equality for all at the centre of its human rights concerns. In the 1960s, it had begun to rely heavily on foreign workers to help it develop its economy, and had subsequently learned to value their contribution to the life of the country at all levels. But it was not enough simply to accept that people were "equal but different"; tolerance and respect for others must also be actively promoted. Many measures had been taken in Germany in response to the cultural and religious needs of immigrants and refugees from all parts of the world. There were currently almost 3 million Muslims in Germany, and a consensus was emerging in Parliament that the precepts of Islam should be taught in Germany's schools. Some regional initiatives had already been taken in that regard. It was clear, however, that civil society as a whole must take positive action to promote tolerance. An Alliance for Democracy

and Tolerance and against Extremism and Violence had been set up to mobilize all the social forces working to combat violence motivated by xenophobia, racism and anti-Semitism; however, much still remained to be done in that field.

50. The Special Debate organized by the Commission was of considerable importance, given the terrible suffering caused throughout the world by conflicts and hatred between different communities and cultures; it provided an occasion to reflect upon effective means of ensuring tolerance and mutual respect.

51. Mr. SABHARWAL (India) said that diversity of cultures, races and religions was a source of enrichment for humanity and that, if peace and harmony were to prevail, it was more than ever necessary to encourage tolerance, understanding and mutual respect at national and international levels. He noted with concern an unwelcome resurgence of chauvinism, fanaticism and sectarianism: some groups sought to place religion at the service of violence and terror. Yet it was well known that no religion preached violence or the elimination of adherents of other religions. Everyone should be free to exercise freedom of conscience and worship.

52. The Constitution of India guaranteed those rights and protected religious minorities. India believed that only democracy could foster a culture of tolerance and pluralism and a discrimination-free State in which the rule of law prevailed.

53. Mr. OMOWALE CLAY (International Association Against Torture), speaking also on behalf of the December 12th Movement International Secretariat, said that the principle of "the dignity and worth of the human person", set forth in the preamble to the Charter of the United Nations, had never been applied to Africans and the African diaspora, whose ancestors had been victims of the greatest crime ever perpetrated against humanity, namely, the transatlantic slave trade, from whose economic, cultural and political effects people of African descent still suffered.

54. Africans who demanded reparation for that crime were asked to be tolerant of Europeans' expropriation of their ancestors' labour, lands and even lives. In the case of Zimbabwe, it was significant that those who had tolerated Ian Smith were now intolerant of President Mugabe.

55. Universal tolerance and respect would remain words devoid of meaning until such time as the transatlantic slave trade and slavery had been recognized as crimes against humanity and the descendants of the victims had been awarded compensation.

56. Ms. SPALDING (World Federation for Mental Health), speaking also on behalf of Women's Sports Foundation, Interfaith International and the African Commission of Health and Human Rights Promoters, welcomed the convening of the Special Debate in the run-up to the World Conference on Racism. She drew the Commission's attention to the fact that young people, indigenous groups and the disabled were becoming progressively more involved in the preparations for the Conference and in the work of other bodies, particularly through Internet discussion groups.

57. Ms. BLOEM (General Board of United Methodist Church Global Ministries), speaking also on behalf of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women, said that the

international community was aware of the horrible crimes that had been committed in the past and that it must openly debate reparation for those crimes and draw the lessons of the past.

58. Archbishop Tutu had stated that there could be no future without reconciliation. The time had perhaps come for the rest of the world to emulate what had happened in South Africa. The World Conference against Racism might lay the foundations for reconciliation between different cultures and religions.

59. The Most Reverend Desmond TUTU said that South Africa would not have been able to do away with apartheid without the support of the international community, and that South Africans were infinitely grateful for all it had done for them. He was convinced that if the international community had succeeded in defeating apartheid, it was also capable of putting an end to racism and bringing about peace in Northern Ireland and the Middle East. Just as it had helped South Africans to regain their freedom, it could help Jews and Arabs to offer one another an olive branch and live together in harmony.

60. In South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had been very impressed by the magnanimity shown by those who had suffered so terribly under apartheid. The testimonies it had heard had convinced it of humankind's fundamental goodness, and that humans had been created to live together in love and peace.

61. Forgiveness did not mean forgetting or closing one's eyes to the past. In order to be pardoned or granted an amnesty, those who had committed reprehensible acts or even atrocities must first publicly acknowledge their responsibility and ask forgiveness of those they had wronged.

62. As for reparation, nothing could compensate a mother for the loss of a son brutally murdered. However, reparation could be seen as an act of contrition and could help alleviate the pain. In South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had been astonished at the low levels of compensation requested by victims: some parents had requested a tombstone for their son, while others had asked that a street should be named after their child.

63. In conclusion, he invited participants in the Special Debate to share his dream of a new world in which nobody would ever again be excluded or marginalized on grounds of colour, economic status, level of education, nationality, sexual orientation or age.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.